"The Tightest Place I Was Ever In"

A SCRIMMAGE IN CALIFORNIA

BY

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

Author of "Brothers," &c.

World Wanderers Tell of Their Adventures.

My brother is of opinion that the tightest place in which he has seen me was a pair of very snugly fitting Bedford cord riding trousers, worn by me upon a certain pouring wet day in California, dried on me under a semi-tropical sun, and hauled off me by the united efforts of three strong men! In my own opinion, however, I have been in a yet tighter place, although it is certain that I did not suffer so much physical discomfort.

We—my brother and myself—had been shooting in the San Emigdio foothills of the Santa Lucia Mountains; the Coast Range of California. Here, in the early '80s, grizzlies were still to be found.

But, although we saw tracks and sign, the beasts themselves remained invisible. Bear hunters will testify that even if you discover the very lair of the monster whom Californians call "Uncle Ephraim" he is almost invariably not at home.

Finally, we gave up our quest in despair; out of heart and out of grub. My brother suggested that we should find venison at a ranch, the nearest to the wilderness in which we had been wandering for the previous three weeks.

We knew the boss and the foreman; and after a long day's travel were delighted to find both men at home. Living as they were, some hundred miles from the nearest store, with no companions other than half a dozen cowboys, you may be sure that we received a hearty welcome.

As we were putting our horses into the barn; our host said abruptly:

"Got any whisky?"

"A big demijohn—nearly full," I replied. "It's yours, if you want it."

"Shush-h-h! Want it? Not I! We must hide it."

Then he explained that his cook saw red after taking one drink of alcohol. Accordingly, we hid the poison—for poison it is to such fellows—under a bale of hay.

After supper we smoked in the sitting room, which occupied the middle of the house, a long, low room, with a big fireplace at one end of it, our bedroom at the other end, and doors facing each other on the sides; through each door one passed on to a rough veranda.

Garden there was none. Encompassing these, the huge ranch stretched for leagues, a sixty thousand acre grant of foothills and valleys untouched by the plow.

The cowboys squatted about the fire and told stories as they smoked. The four chairs were occupied by boss, foreman, my brother and myself.

The foreman, John, was a big, loose limbed fellow, extraordinarily skilful with the lariat and one of the finest horsemen in southern California. His brother, Charlie, one of the cowboys, was half his size, but wiry as an Apache and of much the same complexion. Both men said little, answering such questions as we put to them curtly, but not uncivilly.

At that time our county—one of the last in California to be roused from sluggish stock raising uses into agricultural and horticultural activities—had become a sort of sanctuary for cattle thieves and desperadoes. Stage coaches were robbed frequently; banks were held up and looted; hardly a month passed without its shooting affray.

The conversation turned naturally enough into these encarmined channels. Some of the bad men were known to us; John, the boss, had taken a prominent part, so it was whispered, in the lynching of a train robber, the terror of the S. P. company, who had worked as a cowboy on this very ranch, had sat, as we were sitting, about the fireplace and had been reckoned by his fellows a quiet, peaceable citizen.

Suddenly the foreman said in a slow drawl:

"Let's quit this talk about bad men. Hugh may be through washin' up at any minute—and it's kinder pussonal, seein' as Hugh's father died with his boots on."

"An' it wouldn't surprise me overly much," remarked Charlie, "ef that same sort o' send-off was in store for Hugh himself."

Hugh was the cook, who saw red whenever he smelled whisky. The boss whispered to me that his father had been strung up to a telegraph post, just outside the county town.

"He's a bad egg," he concluded, "is Hugh, but he's a derned good cook, as cooks go in these parts."

"Sing us a song, Charlie," said one of the cowboys.

After a little pressing, Charlie broke into a mournful ditty; a sort of *recitativo*, setting forth, in dismal procession, the misadventures and miseries of a tramp. The company listened with interest and sympathy.

Looking at the spare figures and bronzed faces about the fireplace, one realized vaguely that in the inexorable trend of events their picturesque occupation must be taken from them within a decade. And dismounted, what awaited them save a dreary tramp afoot through the country across which they had ridden so gaily in the past?

While Charlie was singing I kept an eye on the door, looking for Hugh the cook. I had not had more than a glimpse of him and the son of a man who had been lynched stirred my curiosity. But he did not come in.

After a couple of songs somebody proposed an exhibition of high kicking, which led to other feats of strength and activity. The fun had begun. One could see the grave faces of these silent men change; as their blood began to circulate, one felt as they felt, the throb of excitement, the pulse beating fiercely beneath the touch of competition.

And then, without a moment's warning, Hugh stalked into the room, carrying my magazine rifle in one hand and the demijohn of whisky in the other. Every man save he was unarmed. Hugh had the drop on the crowd.

We stared at him. He was a handsome young fellow, and drink had flushed his cheeks and lent a sparkle to his eyes. He laughed, fingering his rifle as if it were a toy, spinning it around dexterously.

"Put that down, Hugh," said John quietly; "we're having some fun here and we want you to join us."

"Do ye?" said Hugh, contemptuously. "Well, I have joined ye, haven't I? And now I'm a-goin' to have the fun. D'ye know who I am?" He glared at each of us in turn. "I'm not wearin' my crown and robes"—he was in flannel shirt and overalls—"but I'm the king, that's who I am, and don't ye forget it!"

He twirled the rifle faster. Nobody moved.

"Is that gun loaded?" said Charlie.

"You bet! See!" he fired into the ceiling as he spoke. When the noise died away he added savagely:

"I'm the boss to-night, an' I'm a-goin' to make you fellers obey me. A bullet goes plum into the head of the first man as moves without my say so. D'ye hear?"

"We hear," said John quietly. "All the same, Hugh, I'd quit this foolin' if I was you."

"Shut up yer mouth!"

John shut his mouth, almost with a snap. And then I saw that grim fixity of purpose upon his face, which is no more to be mistaken or ignored than the first warning of the rattlesnake poised for his deadly stroke.

"I'm the king, ain't I, Charlie?"

"Sure," said Charlie.

"I'm the king, boys, ain't I? Answer—every mother's son of ye!"

We answered solemnly: "You're the king, Hugh."

"I own this sheebang—hey?" he addressed the boss.

"Looks like it."

"That bein' so, I mean ter choose my comp'ny. I've nothin' agen you, boys," he addressed my brother and me. "You sit right there, an' make yerselves to home. But you," he turned furious eyes on our host, "you swine, you've made it hot for me more'n once. Stan' up!"

The boss rose slowly.

"Now—march! Skin out o' this—an' don't come back to-night! I'm a-goin' ter sleep in yer bed, wear yer pyjamas and play I'm you. Git!"

The boss marched out of the room.

"John and Charlie—stan' up!"

The foreman and his brother stood up. One could see the sinews beneath the skin rigid with rage and humiliation. The head of the rifle covered first one, then the other.

"The bacon and beans didn't suit ye, yesterday," said Hugh, playing with the trigger. "An' las' Sunday, when I overslep' myself, both of ye made remarks, insultin' remarks. Now, down ye go, on yer knees—an' apologize. Quick."

"No," said John quietly. "Shoot an' be d—d!"

Hugh didn't shoot, but he laughed loudly.

"John, old socks, ye've a nerve. Well, you two skip out! An' don't come back! If ye do, by the living Jing', I'll bore a hole through ye. Git!"

They got.

Three cowboys were left. Hugh eyed them reflectively.

"Pore white trash," he said slowly. "You ain't fit ter associate with me an' these yere gen'lmen. Mosey!"

They mosied.

"Hold on! Don't forget to shet the door! Me an' these gen'lmen air a-goin' to whoop things up a bit, understan'? We may paint this sheebang a pale shrimp pink before we quit. And we don't want to be disturbed—see? Make that plain to the boss and John. Because if one o' them doors moves I sha'n't wait to ask who's pushin' it, but I propose ter fire—through it. See? That's all."

The cowboys went out, carefully closing the door. There were no windows, for the doors in the daytime served as such. Hugh laughed, staring hard at me.

"Say," he began, "I heard that son of a gun tell you to hide the demijohn, and I saw where you hid it. Come on, let's celebrate! I'll stand here and watch them doors. One must be keerful. You drink first, boys. Take a good wad—with my regards."

It seemed expedient to humor him, especially as by so doing we gained possession of the whisky. I was putting the demijohn to my lips when I heard Hugh say sharply:

"Jeerooasalem!"

When I looked up both doors were wide open. They opened outward. Hugh glared fiercely through each in turn into the void beyond. Nobody could be seen.

At once I realized what was about to happen. The men had armed themselves, and would have as little hesitation in shooting down this rebel as in killing a cur that had snapped at them. The expedience of taking up a position on the floor occurred to me.

The room was small. With the best wish in the world not to injure us these cowboys must take that risk if the shooting began.

"Will you surrender, Hugh?" John spoke.

"Surrender? Hell!"

A figure, pistol in hand, flitted across the open door; Hugh raised his rifle. Another figure appeared at the opposite door. He turned swiftly; the figure slipped out of sight. This happened half a dozen times with uncanny monotony. Then Hugh said to us:

"Don't be scared, boys; and sit where ye are!"

Obviously Hugh had enough wit to perceive that the men outside might be slow to shoot so long as we sat in the line of fire. But if this madman began the battle, what then?

Afterward three excellent ways of escape occurred to me; at the time, however, my mind seemed blank. We sat perfectly still.

Then the unexpected happened.

Hugh was standing between two open doors, and the autumn wind blew in upon him.

"Charlie," he shouted. "Oh; Charlie!"

An invisible Charlie answered quietly: "What is it, Hugh?"

"I want my coat, d'ye hear? Fetch me my coat."

"Why, certainly," said Charlie.

I wondered whether he would obey this queer order. It might so easily prove a ruse to get an open shot at an enemy.

Charlie walked in, carrying the coat.

All in all, I take this to be one of the coolest and bravest actions I have ever witnessed. He sauntered in, cool as a cucumber, with a slightly derisive smile upon his lips.

"Here's yer coat," he said, holding it up.

Somehow, I divined what was in the cowboy's brain. As he held out the coat I saw Charlie measuring the distance between himself and Hugh.

The rifle was pointed straight at his head.

Hugh, holding the rifle with one hand, reached for the coat. At that moment Charlie ducked and jumped, and I jumped and my brother jumped.

Hugh crashed to the floor with three men upon him. Boss and foreman fell upon our bodies.

When we disentangled ourselves I saw that the boss had the King by the ears and was sitting astride his prostrate body. He raised his Majesty's head and pounded the floor with it.

"Hold hard," said John. "This flooring is kinder rotten."

Next morning Hugh was led to the ranch fence and told politely that if he valued his health he would seek other pastures. He did.

Plan to Reach the Pole from the Yukon.

SEATTLE, Wash., Aug. 29.—An expedition in search of the North Pole will start from Dawson, Yukon Territory, in the summer of 1906 if the plans of the International Society for Polar Research and Experiment are carried out. Gov. W. B. McInnes of Yukon is one of the leaders in the movement and Gen. Greely, U. S. A., thinks the plans of the society feasible.

The main difference between the plans of the Yukon explorers and those of expeditions in the past is that the Yukoners expect to utilize their knowledge of ways and means of existence and transportation in the Arctic. They point out many mistakes made by persons unaccustomed to the Arctic climate who have tried to reach the Pole.

The International Society for Polar Research was organized recently in Dawson with 200 members. One thousand persons attended the public meeting. Among the patrons were Gov. McInnes; Dr. Alfred Thompson, member of the Canadian Parliament; Justices Dugas, Craig and Macaulay, the three highest judges in the Territory; Major Z. T. Wood, commander of the Northwest mounted police, and the foreign consuls in Dawson.

The scheme for the expedition was originated by Dr. Anthony Varicle, who came to Dawson from Paris. In a lecture Charles MacDonald, clerk of the Territorial Court of the Yukon, explained the plans for the expedition.

"Expeditions of all former Pole seekers," said Mr. MacDonald, "have been conducted on lines that would never be approved by northern travelers of experience." He continued:

"The most familiar example of polar endeavor is the Nansen expedition. In that expedition it is shown by Nansen's own book that he understood little of equipping and handling long distance expeditions. Yukoners handle them with much more simplicity, ease and skill.

"Nansen worked in heavy skin robes and was immersed in sweat, then chilled in the ice thereof. Yukoners travel in the light parka, and never permit themselves to sweat.

"Nansen traveled with dogs weighing fifty pounds. Yukoners never use dogs weighing less than 100 to 150 pounds.

"Nansen drove his dogs with each hitched to a single strand, and they always were entangled and caused interminable trouble and endless delay. Yukoners drive their dogs in tandem harness, and have scarcely any such trouble.

"Nansen had no handles to his sleighs. Handles are a great and indispensable essential to the Yukoner in helping right the sleighs.

"Nearly every expedition sent to the Arctic thus far has been composed of sailors, men who are useless on land or anywhere but aboard ship. Those expeditions not military were largely semi-military.

"All were headed and composed of men not acquainted with or experienced in the North. It is the object and plan of Dr. Varicle to draw the great contrast right here. He will have none but the most experienced Northern mushers and travelers, and none but most experienced and best trained heavy Yukon dogs.

"The question of fuel and sufficient supplies to carry the expedition across the ice is the stickler. Varicle proposed to overcome this with an auxiliary expedition of mules. He can make the mules last 130 days or more by killing a mule every few days for food for the dogs.

"By thus supplying the dogs with mule meat each dog will have nothing to haul but supplies for the men.

"The knowledge of Nansen's great success with the oil burner will be utilized. No artificial heat will be needed for bodies. The oil will be only for cooking purposes. Yukoners often travel many weeks, sleeping under the open sky, with the thermometer 40 to 50 or more below, with only a fur robe for a bed.

"Varicle plans to make an experiment of a trip of several hundred miles here in the Yukon basin this winter over rough ice with unbroken trail. If he can average only ten miles a day in the polar wastes he will succeed.

"His plan is to start from Grant Land and to dash overland, or over the ice, 700 miles to the pole, and then continue 600 more to Franz Josef land, straight beyond from Grant Land, and to make the journey in about 130 days or less. Ships will make connection at both ends.

"It is the plan to try all experiments in the Yukon, with Dawson as headquarters, this winter, and to get the expedition started next June. Eli Verreau and many other famous Yukon mushers have volunteered to go with Varicle."

FISH RESTAURANTS.

A Feature of London and Paris Life That Is Less Common Here.

Returning travelers from London, Paris and Berlin describe with pleasure the "fish restaurants" in those cities, and express some wonder that there are not similar restaurants here.

A "fish restaurant" is not one at which fish is served exclusively, or even chiefly, but a restaurant at which a specialty is made of the service of fish, and at which usually some special fish dish is offered to patrons each day.

In London and Paris such restaurants make as their chief specialty sole, as popular in England as in France. The Paris restaurants, in addition, make a feature of crayfish, cod and mussels, and the London restaurants of whitebait and shrimp.

The variety of fish procurable in these two cities is almost without limitation, but a different fish dish each day requires, in fact, only seven varieties, in the preparation of which there are many specialties.

New York has a larger variety of fish than either London or Paris. The oysters, lobsters and crabs in the New York market are superior to those to be found in large European cities, and the general demand for fish in New York is in excess of what it is in the big cities of other countries. But the custom prevails for the most part here of making fish or sea food a part of the meal furnished at a restaurant, and not a feature of it.

Left Yellow Jack in Her Wake All the Way From the Gulf.

Disastrous Cruise of the Towboat John Porter Up the Mississippi and the Ohio During the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1878.

There are many alive to-day who can remember the disastrous cruise of the Pittsburg steam towboat John Porter, with yellow jack on board, on the Mississippi and Ohio rivers during the summer of 1878. In that year thousands of persons died from yellow fever in New Orleans, Vicksburg, Memphis and other places.

The John Porter was a new boat, 200 feet long, valued at $75,000 and built and owned by the Cumberland Towing Company of Pittsburg. She carried a crew, besides officers, of twenty-six men.

She left Pittsburg about the last of June, 1878, on what was destined to be the most eventful river trip ever taken by any steamboat in the United States. The boat was loaded with cotton ties and nails for the New Orleans market. Chester Mahan, an experienced river man, was the captain, and Charles Dageleman, chief engineer. The boat made a quick trip down stream and reached New Orleans in due time.

In the meantime yellow fever had become epidemic in the city and Capt. Mahan found it impossible to secure a cargo for the up river trip. The John Porter left shortly afterward with three 1,000 ton barges in tow.

Two or three days after she left New Orleans fever broke out on board. Stops were made along shore at New Providence, Vicksburg and Helena, but at each place, as soon as the local authorities found that the John Porter had fever on board, they used shotgun arguments and drove the steamer out again into the river. By this time half of the crew were down with the fever and there had been several deaths.

Finally the steamer arrived at Memphis, where she lay for several days fast to a wharfboat in front of the city.

The city of Memphis at that time was in a very unsanitary condition. No attention had been paid to keeping the streets and alleys clean and the city had no system of sewerage. The lesson that Memphis received in 1878, when thousands of her citizens died, was not lost. It resulted in making the city what it is to-day, a healthful well drained town with modern sanitary improvements.

It is an open question whether or not the John Porter carried yellow fever to Memphis. At all events after the steamer was hurried away from the city the fever at Memphis became more virulent and malignant than it had been and it was not long before people were dying at the rate of two or three hundred a day.

Meanwhile word had been wired from town to town that the steamer John Porter was on her way up stream with many cases of fever on board.

The situation on the boat was shocking. Nearly all the crew were down with the fever and the craft was looked upon along ashore as laden with death. There were so many cases on board that the patients could not get the care they should have had. Supplies were running low and the supply of fuel was short.

The healthy members of the crew went from hamlet to town and fairly begged for provisions and fuel, so that they could make their way north and get out of the yellow fever belt. Everywhere they landed it was the same story, they were driven off at the muzzle of shotguns.

The shotgun quarantine was even more rigid in those days than it has been this summer. All along the river banks, on both sides of the stream, were men armed with shotguns, rifles and revolvers, on the lookout. The citizens of towns yet free from the fever turned out en masse when the John Porter came in sight, staggering up stream with a load of sickness and death on board, and warned her to proceed on her journey.

She was seeking rest and finding none. Citizens of the river towns were so crazed at the idea of fever making an inroad in their communities that they had no pity for anybody but themselves. Once in a while they were prevailed upon to throw some provisions on board the Porter from a rowboat, which then hurried away.

The steamer was undermanned, nearly everybody being down with fever, dying or dead. Yet the steamer finally made out to reach Cairo, where the captain and crew had many friends and expected aid.

They found no warm greeting here. There was less mercy for them than down the river. They were ordered to cross the river and tie up to trees on the Kentucky shore. The woods came down to the river bank and those of the crew who were able went on shore and got a supply of wood. Here also they received a supply of provisions and Capt. Mahan was taken ill.

The steamer lay opposite Cairo for several days. At length the chief engineer, who was now in command, thought he would run up the Ohio as far as Louisville. It would have been wiser to let the boat stay where she was. The steamer had a comfortable berth and those of her crew who were yet living were doing fairly well.

By offering big wages the steamer secured new hands at different points along the river. Fresh men stepped into the places of those dead, only to be taken ill and die in turn. Strange as it may seem men were found willing to risk their lives for the wages offered. Thus it was that the John Porter brought yellow fever into the Ohio River Valley.

The steamer touched at Louisville, but was ordered away. Shortly after she left Louisville the fever broke out there and there were some deaths.

By this time nearly every man on board was either down with the fever or getting over it. What crew she had looked like a lot of ghosts. In this state she reached Cincinnati.

The authorities of Cincinnati had been warned that the John Porter was on its way to that city. A company of State militia and a battery of artillery were ordered out and stationed on the river bank. The steamer was ordered to keep on. If she stopped, they said, they would fire on her.

Through it all Capt. Mahan had stuck to the three barges. But the chief engineer, who was now in command, thought it best to cast them loose when opposite Cincinnati. They were set on fire by the people of the city and burned to the water's edge.

The death ship was ordered to keep on going. Cincinnati did not care where she went, provided it was somewhere else, anywhere away from Cincinnati.

The steamer had left a trail of yellow fever wherever she had touched. There is no telling how many of the crew died, as there was a constant accession of fresh hands. It is estimated that there were as many as forty deaths on board. Some of the crew escaped to the shore and wandered into the interior, where they spread the fever from place to place.

The officers and crew left on board were desperate. A little more than a hundred miles above Cincinnati the steamer was run aground hard and fast on Possum Bar. The river was low, it was impossible for her to go on, and there she remained until late in the fall. Officers and men went on shore and scattered.

They made their way to various points, taking as a companion the much feared yellow jack. Many cases in the Ohio River Valley were afterward traced to this ill fated boat. Two members of the crew got as far as a small village in Pennsylvania below Pittsburg, where one of them died.

When word reached the Cumberland Towing Company in Pittsburg that the John Porter was aground on Possum Bar and deserted, the company by offering a large amount of money secured a gang of men to go down to the boat, fumigate her and bring her up to the city. Almost the first thing they did was to throw into the river everything in the way of mattresses and bedding. These things were scattered for miles down the river and were accused later of doing still more to spread the fever.

After some weeks the steamer was thoroughly fumigated, and soon after cold weather set in the craft was brought up the river to Pittsburg.

Nearly every one of the original crew was dead, but the captain got well. The chief engineer did not have the fever.

The John Porter was now looked upon by roustabouts and river men generally as a hoodoo. It was hard to get men to work on her. Finally her owners decided to overhaul the boat, rebuild her in part and refurnish her from stem to stern. Her name was changed from John Porter to Sidney Dillon.

The steamer ran as a towing boat on the river for several years and became more and more of a hoodoo. She was continually meeting with accidents, and finally settled the hoodoo question for all time, in the eyes of the river men, by exploding her boilers and burning to the water's edge.

A Western Windjammer on Wheels.

The New York man who lives up the State invited his friend from Kansas City to spend Sunday at his house on the Hudson. The trip was made in one of the big racing machines now a common sight in the East.

A mile beyond Yonkers the expected happened. With a sigh the New York man flattened himself out under the machine and tried to mend it. The Kansas City man stood in the middle of the road and leaned against a fence, alternately.

The New York man gave up after an hour of perturbation and profanity, and sent a messenger to the nearest shop for aid. Meanwhile he and his guest occupied a seat in the car and discussed transportation.

"I never was in love with this sort of thing," said the New Yorker, "but barring accidents of this character it gets me there quicker than anything else. Me for a flying machine when it is perfected."

"Anything that goes by wind is too uncertain and erratic for me," replied the Kansas citizen.

"Did you ever try that brand of travel?"

"You people in the East think you have solved the transportation problem," replied the guest. "Why, man, we had flying machines in Kansas when you folks were lumbering up and down Broadway in omnibuses."

"That was a long time ago."

"I know it was. I can give you the exact date—1855. Mind you, I don't say that the machines got up in the air to do business. But the one I am talking about was run by wind.

"We called it a dry land navy. It was constructed to navigate the plains when everybody was trying to get to the gold fields, and when wagoning was the only way to get there. Horses and oxen were too slow for the fellows who had acute cases of gold fever.

"A genius of what is now a suburb of Kansas City figured and worked until he finally turned out a wagon which was to do on land what a schooner does at sea. He rigged it up with sails and an upper deck. The navigator operated the sails from the deck, and the mast was twenty feet in the air. The wagon was of ordinary dimensions.

"When the wagon was completed the inventor—his name was Thomas, gave an exhibition of its powers. A lot of people followed him in his venture.

"The machine operated beautifully. It went out on the prairie for ten miles and returned. Thomas couldn't get away from the people. Edison in his greatest triumph was never as big a man as Thomas was that day.

"The Santa Fé Navigation Company, composed of capitalists, wanted to buy the thing and offered a big sum. Thomas was not quite ready to sell all his interest, but he let enough of it go to help him get out an improvement on the first wagon.

"When the second machine was turned out there was another exhibition. The Santa Fé people came up to blow themselves. The machine fairly sailed. It was the talk of that part of the country.

"Then Thomas got smart, just as you fellows who have these devil wagons have done. He had a lot of fancy stunts which he said the wagon could do—surprises he called 'em—and he turned the wagon loose. It started off all right. Thomas was at the wheel.

"'Watch me!' he yelled to the Santa Féans as he undertook to run the machine in the face of the wind.

"You've seen a ship shiver when it has struck something unseen? Well, this wind wagon of Thomas did more than that. It leaped like a frightened gazelle. It climbed like a stirred up rattler. It butted, it went zigzag, it went ahead, then backed and veered. It jumped a gulley and went over a rail fence. It then took a cut ahead and disappeared.

"One of the Santa Fé crowd who was a doctor had gone out on a mule to see the machine go. When the wagon disappeared the doctor started his mule to overtake the windjammer. The others remained to await Doc's report.

"Late in the day they spied him coming across the field loading the mule. In his effort to overtake Thomas and his wagon the mule had broken down.

"A few weeks later Thomas got back to town, a dejected man. The Santa Fé Navigation Company disbanded, and the first and only attempt in that country to get along without horses failed."

"Then you think I had better stick to the automobile?" said the New Yorker.

"I think that is what we are doing now," said the Kansas City man.

Knabenshue's Hopes and Fears

Airship Man Expects to Be Killed—Thinks Langley Is on the Right Track.

"Roy Knabenshue is looked upon as a pretty smart youngster out in our town," said a man from Toledo. "He can have about anything the Toledo folks have got. His aerial exploits are watched with a good deal of pride by old and young in Toledo, where Roy Knabenshue was born and brought up. The older folks are proud of the 'Kid Knabenshue,' as they advert to him, on account of the youngster's dad, who has been known to every man, woman, child and dog in Toledo for more than forty years.

"Roy Knabenshue has a brother who is also an aeronaut, but this Knabenshue has confined himself up to the present time to the round balloons, and so he hasn't attracted such wide attention, although he is a mighty gritty customer, at that.

"Roy Knabenshue is 29 years old, but he looks like a stripling of twenty. He's a slender, beardless chap, who talks in a very quiet tone, and he's pretty taciturn, at that. But he's there when it comes to a mix, as he has shown on several occasions in Toledo. He's got muscles as hard as tire rubber, and he knows as much about boxing as any man needs to know who isn't in the biffing game professionally. The boy has got a peculiarly hard, steely gray eye—the eye of a desperado, I told him once. In his case it's just the eye of a man built and devised to do remarkable things. When it comes to that, I believe that a man has got to have just a bit of the desperado in his makeup who attempts to do the kind of things that young Knabenshue does with his big, fish shaped gas bag.

"Knabenshue has been fiddling around with the balloons of all shapes since he quit the Toledo High School. I suppose he knows the ins and outs of the gas bags better than any living man, not excepting little Santos-Dumont. His experience in aerial navigation has certainly been much more varied and extensive than the little Brazilian's. The navigation of the air became a bug with Knabenshue from the time he was flying kites as a boy. The cigar or fish shaped contraptions weren't out when he first tackled the game, and so he went in for the round bags, making many ascensions and parachute drops all over the country. In this sort of work he never had an accident, for he is an extraordinarily careful workman in his aerial stunts, and never takes a chance that he knows to be a chance before going up.

"And yet the youngster has for some time had a hunch that he'll sooner or later meet his finish at the airship game. He told me so in Toledo no longer ago than two months, when he was executing a series of astonishing performances with the fish shaped bag that he now has in New York.

"'These old bags will hash me yet,' he said, in substance, on that occasion. 'I'm always expecting to get it. There are about forty things that could happen to a bag of the kind I work with that'd give me the wind up thud. But I don't bother about this hunch when I'm up in the air—it's only between ascensions that I get to thinking about it. I know that it's a dangerous game, and all that, but it's the game that I've got mixed up with, that I know more about than anything else, and so I can't stop. I've had some close shaves with the fish bag, but have managed to scramble out of all of them, more through just bullheaded luck than anything else.

"'Twice out in Los Angeles last winter I thought I was a goner, and I got into a scrape while away up during the series of ascensions at the St. Louis exposition that didn't look very cheerful to me while it was going on. But I wriggled out of all of these messes, as I say, with the aid of a lot of luck. But I'm not fooling myself. The luck thing can't and doesn't stay with a man all the time, and I'm pretty liable to get my dose any time. I take every precaution to guard against trouble, but precautions comprise only about 25 per cent. of it, at the outside, in the aerial game. The remaining 75 per cent. of trouble simply can't be guarded against by the most cautious man in the world, so that the odds are pretty high against the fellow who goes in for traveling where the old fashioned folks say human beings don't belong.'

"Knabenshue doesn't express himself in this fatalistic fashion with the slightest air of bravado, for he is, as a matter of fact, an extremely modest, even diffident young chap, and he has less of the swelled head for a youngster who has got himself so much talked about in a game in which there are few participants than any man I ever met up with. He's simply weighed all the chances, that's all, and he is level-headed enough to know that the odds are away against him.

"Only an hour or so after Knabenshue had mentioned these things to me at the Booty House in Toledo he got into a mess with his airship out at the Toledo fair grounds that looked pretty bad to the eight or ten thousand Toledo folks on the grounds while it was going on. A few days before Knabenshue had ascended from the fair grounds, made his way in the teeth of a twenty mile breeze to the top of the Spitzler building, the tallest office building in Toledo, where he alighted on the roof, and then leisurely sailed back to the fair grounds, taking all of the points of the compass for it on the way back, so that there was a big crowd out at the fair grounds on the following Sunday afternoon, when it was announced that he was going to make another ascension.

"There was a twenty-five knot wind blowing at the time he made his ascension but that wasn't what caused the bother—Knabenshue says that he can beat against virtually a gale of wind if all of his machinery works right. He rose from the middle of the fair grounds all right, got about 500 feet in the air, and then, all of a sudden, the sparker of his motor balked on him and refused to work, and the propellor stopped dead. When the crowd noticed the cessation of the 'chug-chug' of the motor operating the propeller, which makes from 375 to 500 revolutions a minute, they knew that young Knabenshue was in a mess with all of that wind a-going, and a whole lot of the women in the automobiles and buggies and traps on the grounds set up a mighty screaming, while those of the ladies who were fixed gracefully for it, fainted. The strong wind carried the fish shaped bag, sort of half broadside, out of the fair grounds and over a forest of very tall trees on one side of the grounds.

"An airship with the propeller balking isn't of any more use than an ordinary balloon, if as much, in a tight scrape, and the best that Knabenshue could do was to come down, ka-biff, in the topmost branches of the very tallest tree in the clump. The jar knocked him through the framework from which he operates the propeller and the rudder, and it looked like he was due to make a Brer Coon fall of it. But the young fellow showed the agility of a monkey, reaching out and clutching a swinging bough that just about supported him and that's all. From the bough he clambered back into the framework of the airship, which had become mixed up with the branches and was swaying back and forth on top of the tree like some gigantic lummox of a baby rocking itself to sleep.

"The contraption wasn't damaged except for a bent rudder, and Knabenshue coolly disentangled the framework from the boughs, whereupon the big bag settled to the ground in a clearing, Knabenshue still holding on to his position in the framework. By this time all of the men on the fair grounds had raced across fields and over fences to see what everybody present figured was going to be a tragic finish, and when they got to the clearing they found Knabenshue tinkering with the sparker and looking as unconcerned as a man taking an after dinner smoke on a front porch. The airship was out of commission for the day, however, and so about three hundred of the men put their shoulders under the framework and actually carried the big bag, framework and all, with Knabenshue still sitting in it, across fields and gulches and ditches, back to the grounds, and stowed it in the canvas tent where it was kept.

"Knabenshue isn't laboring under any delusions about the airship business. He can't see how the gas bag idea is ever going to solve the problem of aerial navigation, and he is perfectly candid in saying so. After the ascension that landed him in the tree the story got around that he was going to make a stab at sailing from Toledo to Detroit, a distance of about seventy-six miles, in his airship.

"'Yes,' he replied when I asked him about that, 'and I'm presently going to establish an hourly airship schedule between New York and San Francisco and another one between Detroit and New Orleans, carrying passengers, freight, the United States mails, and so on—when there's pink snow in August.

"'These old bags are never going to solve the riddle,' he went on. 'Nobody that knows anything about the game ever makes any such imbecile claim as that comes to. There's no way that that matter of weight will ever be overcome, unless they fix up a framework made of spider webs and a motor made of silk threads. I've got a margin of only five pounds weight with the machine I'm using, and that's mighty small, when you begin to figure on it. Not only that, but an airship motor of the kind that can be carried within the weight limitations can only keep the bag in the air for two hours at the outside.

"'I never claimed anything for the airship—that it will ever be a practical vehicle for navigating the air; that is, except by specialists purely for exhibition purposes. I've simply got a big, fish shaped bag rigged up so that I can move it around at will in the air for a little while—that's all I'm claiming. That the gas filled bag will ever be developed into a contraption that will permit of all hands taking a whack at the air navigating business is something that no man who has ever been up in one of them believes for a minute.'

"At that, Knabenshue is firmly of the conviction that human beings will be navigating the air within a few decades. He believes that the aerodrome will eventually prove to be the thing.

"'Prof. Langley has got the right idea,' he told me, 'and the fact that his intricate machine plunged into the Potomac a few times on its trial trips doesn't prove that he isn't on the right tack. His unsuccessful experiments brought the learned old gentleman an amount of ridicule that his efforts didn't deserve. A lot of great scientific minds, in this country and across the water, are studying the air navigating problem nowadays, and they're virtually united in the belief that the aerodrome is the thing. None of them takes any stock in any kind of an airship as a solution of the riddle. And of course they've got that right.'

"Individual flying machines are a thing of the very near future, in Knabenshue's opinion.

"'I know several fellows who have been experimenting with winged contraptions,' he said, 'run by the power of elbow grease and by motors, for years, and at least three of these chaps have got machines already perfected that they can actually fly with, not in little no-account aerial sprints, but through a distance of ether. Commercially practicable flying machines are only a little way off. But the flying machine, while it will furnish plenty of sport when it comes, isn't the thing—it isn't the solution of the problem of aerial navigation—to repeat that phrase of which most of us are becoming a bit tired. Aerial navigation means the ability to take your wife and mother-in-law, or your girl and her mother, and all of the baggage, and the parrot and the fox terrier pup, so to speak, on a little spin from here to Chicago and back whenever you feel like it. That's going to come, too, when the day's ripe for it. But it'll never come if the gas bag is depended upon to do the business.'"